

Antonio Sala Ranch, Barn  
(Lightning "W" Ranch, Barn)  
7300 Franktown Road  
Washoe Valley  
Washoe County  
Nevada

HABS No. NV-24-A

HABS  
NEV  
16-WAVA,  
1A-

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94107

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ANTONIO SALA RANCH, BARN  
(Lightning "W" Ranch, Barn)

HABS No. NV-24-A

Location: 7300 Franktown Road  
Washoe Valley  
Washoe County  
Nevada

USGS Carson City, Nev. Quadrangle (7.5')  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 11/255900/4346525

Significance:

The Antonio Sala Barn and related ranch buildings are historically significant in the area of agriculture. The property is eligible for listing on the National Register under criterion A, for its lengthy association with the 19th and early 20th century agricultural development of Washoe Valley.

The primary historical significance of Washoe Valley is related to its association with the Comstock Mining District and Virginia City. The impetus for the initial agricultural development of the Washoe Valley was the discovery of silver and the subsequent boom of the Comstock mines between 1859 and the mid-1870s. During that period Washoe Valley was the primary source of the mining district's agricultural products and lumber and became a vital part of the Comstock's silver rush. The Valley also provided the location of the first ore mills that processed the Comstock's silver.

The Comstock Mining District of Nevada is significant in United States history for the wealth of gold and silver that was mined and milled there and for the personalities and events associated with that wealth. It is recognized that the Comstock was responsible for the creation of the Nevada Territory in 1861 and Nevada statehood three years later. The Comstock wealth helped finance the Union cause in the Civil War, it built transcontinental railroads, steamship lines, the transatlantic cable, and even helped build the city of San Francisco in the 1860s and 1870s. At its peak, the Comstock boasted a population of 30,000 inhabitants. The Comstock District, an area of 14,700 acres, was designated the Virginia City National Historic Landmark in 1961.

The Sala Barn is also significant in the area of architecture, and is eligible to the National Register under criterion C as a good example of nineteenth century vernacular barn design and construction methods. Built using a heavy timber post and beam structural frame with mortised, notched, and pegged connections, it typifies the method of construction for large agricultural buildings once common in the Washoe Valley from the 1860s through the 1880s. It is one of six documented barns existing in Washoe Valley dating from that era and built with the same method of construction. Of the five other barns, three are located on the Little Bangor/Cliff Ranch and are under single

ownership. Another barn is located on the Parks Ranch, and the fifth is located on the Twaddle/Pedroli Ranch.

The property's period of significance is from 1859 through 1940. That period includes the Comstock Mining Era which precipitated the early agricultural development of the Washoe Valley, including the initial ranching activities on the Lightning "W" Ranch. The period extends through 1940 which is the span of time that the ranch actively contributed to local commercial agriculture, particularly the dairy industry. The Sala Barn retains sufficient integrity of design, materials, and workmanship to convey its association with local agricultural history and nineteenth and early twentieth century ranch architecture.

#### Architectural Information:

The Antonio Sala Barn and Related Ranch Buildings are located on the 395 acre Lightning "W" Ranch which is situated in the southwestern portion of Washoe Valley. The ranch property straddles Franktown Road, with the Sala Barn and working ranch complex located about 200 yards north of the roadway. A grouping of residences is situated opposite the barnyard on the south side of Franktown Road.

Washoe Valley is a 12 mile long by 6 mile wide, tear-shaped valley defined geographically by the Carson Range on the west, and the Virginia Range on the east. Washoe City is located at approximately the northern end of the valley, and the development of Lakeview is situated at the southern end. The two developments are connected by State Route 395, the principal roadway between Carson City to the south, and Reno to the north. Washoe Lake is the most dominant geographic feature of the valley. The 4800 acre lake extends along most of the length of eastern Washoe Valley. The current appearance of the valley is characterized by a mix of agricultural land and low to medium density residential development.

The Sala Barn and Related Ranch Buildings are accessed from an unpaved drive off Franktown Road. The seven buildings are within a four acre area, with the Sala Barn and the Horse Barn dominating the central part of the site. The Vehicle Storage Shed is about 70 foot west of the Sala Barn. Five other non-contributing buildings are located within the complex.

The site surrounding the ranch building complex is characterized by uncultivated grasslands and open fields. Mature trees, including Carolina Poplars and Willows, surround some of the buildings. All were planted after 1935. No fences or corrals exist at the ranch building complex. A wood plank and post fence, built after 1954, extends along both sides of Franktown Road.

The Antonio Sala Barn is centrally located among the grouping of six other related ranch buildings in the barnyard area. Built in two phases between about 1870 and 1880, the barn is a rectangular, one and a half story wood frame building, measuring 45 feet wide by 123 feet long. The exterior walls are sided with vertical boards and battens. The building is covered with a steeply pitched gable roof with a catslide roof extending along the south side. The roof is covered with wood shingles which have been over

roofed with asphalt shingles. A central cupola was added in 1936. The structural framing for the barn is a heavy timber post and beam system forming a grid of seven bays along its east-west axis. The building is in a maintained condition with a substantial amount of its original integrity intact.

The primary entrance to the barn is through a pair of wood sliding barn doors at the west end of the north wall. A second single leaf sliding barn door is located at the west gable wall. It was installed after 1955. The concrete ramp leading to the barn door threshold is stamped with the Lightning "W" brand. Two other sliding barn doors occur off center along the south wall. The eastern most 40 feet of the north wall has been modified to provide for horse stall doors and windows and the wall surface has been resided with pressed fiberboard. A shed roofed canopy supported with steel pipe columns extends along that portion of the wall. A wood frame lean-to addition was built in the 1960s along the east gable wall. It is open along the east end and the side walls are sheathed with board and batten siding.

Built about 1870, the earliest portion of the barn consists of the west three structural bays which provide for a 30 by 50 foot barn. The second phase was probably built before 1880 and consists of the east four structural bays. The floor of that portion of the barn slopes to the east. The catslide roofed south extension was added in 1935. The interior of the barn is essentially an open plan with a central alley formed by two rows of the heavy timber posts. The southeast portion of the barn has a sloped concrete floor and was used as a milking area. Box stalls for horses had been built in three bays of the northeast quadrant of the barn in the mid 1970s.

The wood posts and beams of the earliest part of the barn are 10" by 10" timbers with mortised and pegged connections. All beams and purlins are knee braced with notched connections. Most, but not all of the 6" by 8" or 8" by 10" post and beam timbers of the east half of the barn are also mortised and pegged.

#### Historical Information:

The relationship between the Comstock District and Washoe Valley was symbiotic. Water, a scarce commodity in the dry mountains around Virginia City, was necessary for the processing of silver ore. Water also provided irrigation for the growth of agricultural products, fruit, and cattle. Water was abundant in the mile-high Washoe Valley. Numerous streams, including Franktown Creek, Ophir Creek, and Davis Creek fed Washoe Lake and Little Washoe Lake from the Sierra Nevada to the west. As a result Washoe Valley accommodated both irrigated crop agriculture and water powered stamp mills for the ore. Wagon loads of produce and lumber from the Valley, hauled by teams of horses, mules, or oxen, constantly lined the mountainous dirt road up Ophir Grade to Virginia City. On the return trip, wagons were filled with silver ore destined for the crushers at ten stamp mills located in the valley. By the mid-1860s, Washoe Valley had become an important component to the success of the Comstock boom, feeding the miners and providing lumber for construction and timber for the mines.

The Valley supported three towns: Franktown, Ophir, and Washoe City. Those communities enjoyed unprecedented growth between 1860 and 1869 due principally to their economic relationship with the Comstock. Washoe Valley boomed from 270 people in September 1860 to 1005 people in July 1861. Washoe City was named the county seat when Washoe County was formed in 1861. In the mid-1860s, as many as 6000 people inhabited Washoe Valley.

By 1870 there were twelve principal agricultural ranches operating in the Washoe Valley. They were located near the western side of the valley along Franktown Road, the valley's primary north-south route. During the mining rush, those ranches supplied mostly dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and grain to the Comstock District. Following is a listing of those ranches in order of location when traveling south through the Valley:

- Winters Ranch (1862), listed on the National Register (extant)
- Twaddle/Pedroli Ranch (1860), (extant)
- J. Frey (Heidenreich Ranch) (Ca. 1860), (extant)
- Little Bangor/Cliff Ranch (Folsom Mill, S. M. Best Ranch) (1861), (extant)
- R. W. and H. I. Perkins Ranch (Ca. 1862)
- Parks Ranch (Ca. 1860), (extant)
- W. P. Musgrove Ranch, (1862-1869)
- Lewers Ranch (Heidenreich Ranch) (Ca. 1860), (extant)
- Antonio Sala Ranch (Pierce Ranch) (Ca. 1860), (extant)
- J. Kelly Ranch (Ca. 1862)
- Walter Cliff Ranch (Ca. 1862), listed on the National Register (extant)
- Simmonds Ranch (Ca. 1862)

By 1870 those ranches contained a total of approximately 160 acres of cultivated fields used for row crops and sustained by a man-made irrigation system of canals and laterals. The remaining agricultural land in the vicinity of those ranches totaled several thousand acres and was given to open range or cultivated pasture land for livestock. In addition, two sawmills, the Lewers and Elliott Steam Saw Mill and G. Folsom's Central Mill, operated in the agricultural area along western Washoe Valley and were eventually incorporated into adjacent ranch operations.

The boom period exchange system between the Comstock and Washoe Valley began to falter as early as 1866 with the building of mills on the Comstock and the Carson River. In 1869 that once important relationship changed substantially with the completion of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad to Empire near Carson City. Stamp mills in Washoe Valley were moved to new locations closer to the mines. Lumber yards in Carson City started to supply most of the lumber for construction and timber for the mines, therefore lessening the importance of lumber milling in Washoe Valley. In 1871 the county seat was moved to Reno and the courthouse in Washoe City was sold for \$250. That event signaled the end of the Comstock's influence on Washoe Valley's initial development.

The final break in the economic connection between Washoe Valley and the Comstock District began in 1877 when the ores of the Comstock began to fail. By 1880 the population of Washoe City had declined to 200, and Washoe Valley's boom population

also depleted significantly. During the 1880s and 1890s the economic livelihood of those ranchers remaining in the valley became increasingly dependent upon local markets for their agricultural products. By the turn-of-the-century, the valley had evolved to support a stable farming and ranching population. Dairying, cattle growing, hay production, and to a certain extent fruit orchard cultivation were the principal agricultural activities that emerged in the valley. By 1900 Washoe Valley's final evolution from its important role in supplying the Comstock to its role as a secluded mountain valley with a modest agricultural economic base, was complete.

Six of the twelve primary ranches that emerged in Washoe Valley during the Comstock rush provide excellent illustrations of the valley's nineteenth century evolution. One characteristic of that evolution as exemplified by those ranches was that in most cases ranch ownership changed in the 1880s in syncopation with the declining importance of the Valley to the Comstock. A second characteristic was the change in agricultural uses in response to market demands, such as the increase in the dairy industry after 1880. The Twaddle/Pedroli Ranch is one good example of that evolution. The Twaddle family settled the ranch just south of Franktown about 1860. They sold their ranch in 1885 to two Swiss brothers, A. J. and Steve Pedroli. The brothers began a dairy at that time which evolved into one of the most successful operations in the Washoe Valley. The Pedroli family operated the dairy for over fifty years, and sold the property in 1947. A well preserved notched and pegged wood frame barn dating from the Twaddle family ownership still exists on the ranch and was used by the Pedroli brothers as part of their dairy operation.

Another example of the agricultural evolution of the valley is the J. Frey Ranch, now known as the Heidenreich Ranch, which was settled about 1860. During the Comstock boom era, Frey had approximately 60 acres of irrigated cropland as well as pasture land, and sold grain, hay, and garden produce to Virginia City residents. In 1885, after the Comstock decline, Frey sold the ranch to Henry Heidenreich. Heidenreich, with his two sons, operated the 300 acre ranch as a large dairy through 1942, supplying mainly the local market.

Also characteristic of the evolving rural economy of Washoe Valley between 1860 and the post-Comstock era is the Lewers/Heidenreich Ranch. Ross Lewers settled at that location between 1858 and 1860 and, with his two partners W. T. C. Elliott and Emmanuel Penrod, constructed and operated the first steam saw mill in the Valley. Known as the Penrod Mill, it was still in operation by 1870. After Lewers' trees were depleted, he successfully turned to farming and growing fruit. The Lewers' orchard is thought to be the first apple orchard on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada. In the 1880s, when the Comstock was no longer a source of commerce for Washoe Valley, Lewers sold the ranch to the Heidenreich family.

The Parks Ranch is another illustration of the pattern of change in Washoe Valley. The ranch consisted of the homestead of three related Mormon families, T. I., C., and F. Parks. It was established in 1860 in the midst of the Comstock boom. By 1869 the ranch included about 20 acres of irrigated crop land as well as pasture land. After 1870 portions of the ranch were purchased by local ranchers Harvey Perkins and Ross Lewers. By 1886, following the decline in trade with the Comstock District, the ranch was purchased by James Lamb who planted an orchard and raised cattle. A cheese

factory and dairy were established by subsequent owner Dan Wheeler in 1915, with dairy products sold to area markets. One of the best examples of a mortised and pegged wood frame barn dating from the 1860s (Parks ownership period), still exists on the ranch. The Parks Ranch is also an example of the Valley's twentieth century modest role in the tourism and divorce ranch industry. In 1923, a portion of the ranch was sold to noted western author Will James, and became The Washoe Pines Dude Ranch, which evolved in the 1930s as a divorce ranch.

The Little Bangor/Cliff Ranch provides another excellent example of the Washoe Valley-Comstock District relationship. The ranch was first established as a small lumbering and milling community centered around the 1861 Central Mill. The mill owners, Folsom and Bragg, also grew hay, grain, and vegetables on about 300 acres. Little Bangor supplied the Comstock and other mining areas with lumber as well as agricultural products. In 1874, in the midst of the waning economic dependence on the Comstock, the ranch was purchased by Samuel Cliff. He cultivated the property with his sons, Fred and Alvin, until his retirement in 1918. An adjacent ranch, operated in 1869 by S. M. Best, and owned by William Thompson, was acquired by the Cliff family in 1909. The Cliff brothers established a dairy on the combined properties, supplying the area markets. Family members Norman and Donald Cliff continued to operate the dairy until a few years ago. The ranch contains three well-preserved mortised and pegged wood frame barns dating from the 1870s. One of the cow barns is built on the stone foundation of the 1861 Central Mill.

The Walter Cliff Ranch Historic District, which is listed on the National Register, is perhaps the best remaining example of ranches in the Washoe Valley associated with supplying the Comstock mining boom. The original 130 acre parcel was first settled by Mathew McGarth, who constructed the vernacular Victorian house on the site. Walter and Elizabeth Cliff purchased the ranch in 1874 after having lived on the property for a few years. They grew fruit, vegetables, and hay. They also established a dairy herd. Cliff made regular trips to Virginia City to sell his produce and dairy products, and after the Comstock mining peak, the Cliffs sold produce in Carson City, Washoe City, and Reno. The historic district exemplifies the rural historic landscape of Washoe Valley in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to the vernacular Victorian house, the site contains a root cellar/residence, bunkhouse, two sheds, and a garage. The partially wooded site contains century old cottonwood trees, mature birch trees, and fruit trees. An orchard adjoins the buildings to the south and west, with pasturage to the north and east. The borders are defined by board and post fencing and stone walls.

Washoe Valley continued as a secluded mountain valley characterized by agricultural land uses through the mid twentieth century. In the 1960s some residential development began on the east side of the Valley. The western edge of the Valley along Franktown Road has retained its rural character although very little commercial ranching is still undertaken.

#### *Antonio Sala Barn and Related Ranch Buildings*

Construction of the original barn is attributed to Antonio Sala who was acquiring property and perfecting water rights for the land between 1858 and 1870. The Antonio

Sala Barn was built by at least 1870. Between 1859 and 1862, a house was built on the property. It appears on the Government Land office (GLO) map for the area, surveyed in 1862. The house was located immediately to the north of the present barnyard area. The 1869 updated version of the GLO map attributes the house (and/or other improvements) to "H. Pierce." Sala's ownership of that particular part of the property may have come shortly afterwards. A closer review of the ownership records would verify that assumption.

From the 1870s, probably through 1890, the ranch was operated by Sala as a dairy. He may also have grown field crops, including hay for his own purposes and for the local market. It is not known when or to whom, Sala sold the ranch, or when the original (ca. 1862) house was removed.

From at least 1922 (and probably earlier) to 1935, the property was owned by Joseph (Joe) Rosselli. During that time, Rosselli operated a dairy on the ranch. In 1922, Rosselli had his brand, "JR," registered and listed his address as Franktown. The Sala Barn continued to be used as a cow and milk barn. A milk house, possibly also used for making cheese and for storage was located at approximately where the current Chicken House is now located. Another wood frame building was located north of the present Horse Barn. Additionally, a wagon barn or shed was located west of the Sala Barn, about where the Vehicle Storage Shed is now located. All three buildings were removed sometime after 1940. After Joe Rosselli sold the ranch in 1935, it would never again function as a commercial dairy.

William Bassett purchased the ranch from Rosselli in 1935 and the Bassett family occupied the ranch through 1940. During that period, the ranch was used primarily to raise cattle, William Bassett imported registered Hereford cattle from Texas which arrived in Washoe Valley via the Virginia and Truckee Railroad. The herd included one registered bull and twenty four cows. Bassett eventually sold the cattle to the local Indian Boarding School and they were used as its foundation herd. The Bassetts also had three brown Swiss cows which provided the family with milk and other dairy products. Pigs and chickens were also raised on the ranch. During the Bassett family ownership the ranch buildings were repaired and remodeled. The Employee's House was constructed and originally used as a chicken house. It contained two rooms, one for laying hens, and one for French hens that Mrs. Bassett raised. In about 1936, Bassett also built the Ranch Manager's House. The wagon barn west of the Sala Barn was also extensively repaired and upgraded.

In addition, William Bassett repaired and refurbished the Sala Barn. Among other things he installed the cupola on the roof and built the catslide roofed extension along the south wall. All of the buildings were painted white and the wood shingle roofs and trim were painted green. Evidence of that color scheme still exists on the buildings.

In 1940, the ranch was sold to Eugene Hillsmith. He owned the ranch until about 1950 and it was used primarily to raise cattle and eventually horses. In 1941, Hillsmith registered the B-E (B bar E) brand and the ranch became known as the B-E Ranch. The Horse Barn was built by Hillsmith in 1944. He also built the current Chicken House, probably in 1944. It was built with asbestos shingles similar to that used on the Horse Barn.



From about 1950 to 1955 the ranch was owned by Mr. Beia. In 1955, the property was acquired by Grant J. Weise, Sr. He renamed the ranch the Lightning "W" Ranch. Among other activities, Weise raised registered Angus cattle. The ranch is currently owned by his son, Robert Weise. Several modifications to the existing buildings and new construction in the barnyard area were undertaken during the Weise family ownership. Modifications to the Sala Barn included removal of the hayloft floor, installation of a sliding door on the west gable wall, and construction of the lean-to along the east gable wall which was used to shelter bulls.

In 1970, the Box Stall Barn was built and was used for boarding horses. Between 1958 and 1965, both the Ranch Manager's House and the Employee's House were extensively remodeled and enlarged.

Sources:

Rainshadow Associates. *Washoe Valley Ranch Inventory*. 1985.

Ratay, Myra Sauer. *Pioneers of the Ponderosa: How Washoe Valley Rescued the Comstock*. Sparks, NV: Western Printing & Publishing Company. 1973.

Woodward Architectural Group. *Lightning "W" Ranch: Historic Property Evaluation, Project Effect, and Mitigation Plan for the Antonio Sala Barn and Related Ranch Buildings*. 1993.

Project Information:

The Ranch is to be developed as a residential golf community with 107 estate residential parcels and a championship 18 hole golf course. The ranch is being developed into ten 2 1/2 acre parcels and ninety-seven 1+ acre parcels surrounding the golf course. The entire ranch complex will be demolished in order to develop the golf course and residential community.

This document was prepared by: Ana B. Koval, Architectural Historian, Rainshadow Associates, P. O. Box 2650, Carson City, NV 89702. This report was compiled from the *Lightning "W" Ranch: Historic Property Evaluation, Project Effect and Mitigation Plan for the Antonio Sala Barn and Related Ranch Buildings* prepared by Woodward Architectural Group in September 1993.



